"THE BEST JOB I EVER HAD"

/Jamie Neal-Ball, Public Information Officer

Upon finishing his stint with the military police in 1966, Herb Bowling decided that he did not want to continue as a law enforcement officer. Apparently, he had a change of heart.

Since then, he's made law enforcement his career, serving 21 years with the Kentucky State Police and what will soon be 17 years with the Department of Criminal Justice Training. He has been DOCJT's deputy commissioner since May 2002.

Through all of his work, Bowling has been able to make contacts across Kentucky. His skill in working with people has made him successful as DOCJT's liaison to law enforcement associations and the state legislature.

The deputy commissioner and his wife, Bonnie, live in Bath County and enjoy working on their Tennessee cabin in their spare time. They have four children, seven grandchildren and three step-grandchildren.

What are your main duties as DOCJT's deputy commissioner?

I'm second in command, of course. I do about anything in the agency that needs to be done. I've been pretty much all over the agency at one time or another – know how it operates. I act in the absence of the commissioner to take care of business as it goes along day to day. Also, I am the agency liaison for the legislature and all the police departments and organizations throughout the state. That takes a good portion of my time. I give direction to the executive staff – the directors and the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council, and some of the other folks that work out of the Commissioner's Office.

What do you enjoy about your work?

It's the best job I ever had. I really enjoy it. You get to not only interact with the people within the agency, but also practically everybody in the state at some point or another. You get to maintain all your police contacts and don't have to do the actual police work, so that's a big plus.

What appeals to you about the field of law enforcement?

I think the biggest thing that appeals to me in the area of law enforcement is you have an opportunity to improve the quality of life as it relates to police services, not only for law enforcement personnel, but also for everybody in the state.

Here at the Department of Criminal Justice Training – You can't go anywhere else and have the impact on law enforcement services that you can have here. You can be police chief in Lexington, police chief in Louisville, commissioner of state police, and you can have limited impact in certain areas, but at the Department of Criminal Justice Training – through our training programs and services that we provide – we impact every individual and every community in this state, so that's the big thing. >>

/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas

>> Why did you choose law enforcement for your career?
That's a long story.

I went into the military when I was 18 years old, and I saw these guys riding around Fort Knox wearing white hats, white gloves, sharp uniforms, and I thought, "That's what I would like to do."

When I graduated from basic training, they assigned me to the military police, so I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia, for training. I came back to Fort Knox Military Police.

I got out of the military, and I said there are two things I'm never going to do again: I'm never going to work for a job that doesn't pay good money, and I'm never going to be a police officer.

About a year later I joined the state police, became a police officer making barely minimum wage, so here I am. That was in 1967.

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Of course I was in the military police from '64 through '66, so I've been in law enforcement-related work since 1964.

Why did you say you would never be a police officer after you left the military?
Well, I was young and didn't really know what life was about outside the military. I found out I really missed being a police officer and being able to do all those things that police officers did. I never was big on the power syndrome or anything like that. I enjoyed doing those things that would help people and help the community, and I just liked doing police work.

Tell readers about your background.
I grew up in Breathitt County in a little community called Lick Branch. I went to Breathitt County High School and graduated there. I attended Lees Junior College for a short period of time. I was tired of school, so I joined the military and spent two years in the Army. I got out of the Army and went to Flint, Michigan, and worked at General Motors for about 10 months, applied for a job with the state police and came back to Kentucky.

I was hired by the state police in July of '67, graduated from the academy in January and went to the Morehead Post. I worked there as a trooper for about seven years, was promoted to detective sergeant, went to Pikeville and worked about three months, and then transferred back to Frankfort in charge of minority recruiting. I spent about eight months in minority recruiting and went back to Morehead as a uniformed sergeant.

In November of '78 I was promoted to detective lieutenant and went to the Ashland Post, came back to Morehead in May of '79 and stayed there until I retired in July of '88.

I took a year off from work, at my own urging. I decided when I retired that I was not going to do anything for a year, and that's exactly what I did. I just traveled and fished. It was my time.

I always knew when I retired I wanted to come to the Department of Criminal Justice Training, and I was fortunate enough to get hired in November of 1990. I worked a year as an instructor in both Basic and In-service. The training division director's job came open, and I was fortunate enough to get that. That's the job I really wanted when I hired in, but it wasn't available. I was just very fortunate to be able to move into that job.

You went to college for a while before joining the military. What were your plans for your life then?
I didn't have any. I was just going to college to be going to college.

Then after I joined the state police, I enrolled in Eastern Kentucky University and got a bachelor's degree in 1975. I enrolled in the master's program and earned my master's in 1983.

You spent most of your career up to this point working for KSP. Please talk about your time with KSP.

I had a great career with the state police. Actually, the most enjoyable period of time was working as a trooper on the road. I worked pretty much the entire 11 counties at some point or another during my road tender. Of course, I enjoyed my entire career with the state police.

As a detective lieutenant, you were in charge of all the criminal cases within post. We had several heinous-type murders, and I actually ended up involved with two cases that people got the death penalty. To be able to coordinate and bring all those cases together and end up with the final result is very rewarding. You really get an appreciation for the victims when you deal with those kinds of cases.

I had a great career and enjoyed it. Of course I enjoyed it so much, I guess three of my sons decided they wanted to try it too.

As you mentioned, working for KSP has been a family affair for the Bowlings. How did that happen?
I really never encouraged any of my kids to go into law enforcement, and I don't really know what attracted them to it other than just seeing me get up every morning and go to work.

But my oldest son joined the state police when he was 22, and I think he probably influenced the other two to get into the field more than I did.

Of course my second son worked as a dispatcher for about a year and then went to the state police. My youngest son was in high school at that time. He was getting ready to graduate, and they had some sort of a rally over at the school – and I thought this was very cool because they interviewed him on the radio. They asked him what he was going to do when he graduated from high school. He said, "I'm going to college for a couple of years." Of course, state police required 64 college hours. "Well what are you going to major in?" "I'm going to major in state police." They said, "Well, why are you going to do that?" He said, "Well I want to be a trooper." He said, "Why do you want to be a trooper?" He said, "Well, my dad's one – was one – my older brother's one, my second oldest brother's one; I just think it's the thing to do." That's kind of his route to getting there.

What do you do in your role as DOCJT's liaison with Kentucky's law enforcement associations?
Primarily, I answer all their questions. If they've got problems, I'll work on helping them get those problems solved. If there's something that needs to be coordinated between our agency and their departments, I'll make sure that happens. Those types of things.

What are some instances in which you have made a difference as DOCJT's law enforcement association liaison?
There are numerous instances.

Under the professional standards, when we got that in place I was pretty much in charge of doing the sales pitch on that to get the support drummed up for it. So I traveled all over the state and met with every police group that I could think of and a lot of individuals and talked about the benefits of having professional standards. The sheriffs' association – a lot of members were opposed to professional standards. But after meeting with those folks and laying it out – the benefits and the pros and the cons – they signed on board with it. In fact, every professional association in the state signed on to the professional standards.

You are also DOCJT's legislative liaison, and, as such, you championed the passage of the Peace Officer Professional Standards Act. Next year is the 10-year anniversary of the POPS legislation. What are your thoughts on the standards now?

That has been the single-most favorable impact on law enforcement that I've experienced in my entire career. The quality of law enforcement has just increased so much. Everybody's involved. It's fostered much better working relationships with departments throughout the state because any officer in the state could go out now and know that he's got qualified, trained, competent people to back him up and assist him. That wasn't the case when I worked the road, because while you had a lot of good deputy sheriffs and a lot of good people out there, they just didn't really know what to do, and it kind of put you in a corner knowing that you were in a tight situation of >>

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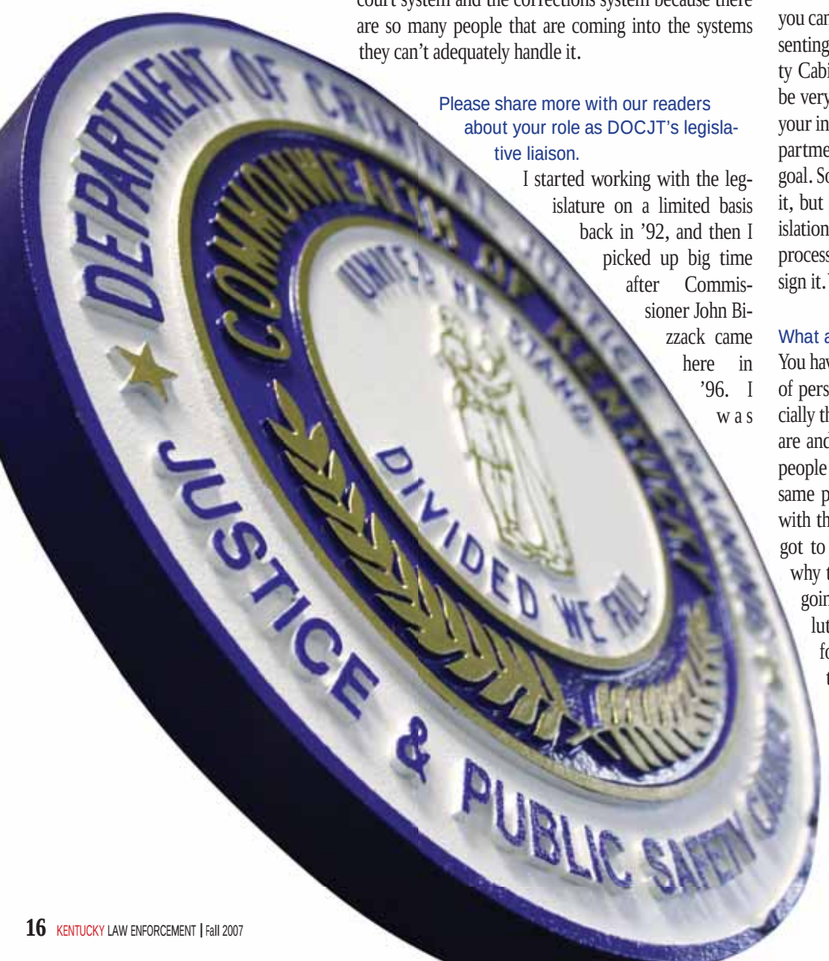
▲ DOCJT's deputy commissioner began his law enforcement career as a military police officer after joining the Army at age 18. He wanted to become a police officer after seeing the officers riding around Fort Knox wearing white hats, white gloves and sharp uniforms.



>> not knowing how the other person was going to react. There are several stories I could relay about that that I'm not going to.

Do you see a need to make changes to the POPS law at this point or in the future?

I think in the area of law enforcement you're always going to have changes and adjustments that need to be made. I can't go into anything really specific right now because that's kind of a circumstance or situational thing that you deal with as you come to it. In a lot of ways law enforcement still has the exact same duties and functions it did years ago but it's just expanded so much and has so many specialized areas that used to not be too much cause for concern or weren't dealt with very well by the law enforcement community. But I think if you look at law enforcement in general, and I like to think that law enforcement has something to do with crime rates – I think you've seen those go down since we've had professional standards in place. I think law enforcement's doing a great job. In fact, we're probably doing such a good job that we've overwhelmed the court system and the corrections system because there are so many people that are coming into the systems they can't adequately handle it.

Please share more with our readers about your role as DOCJT's legislative liaison.

I started working with the legislature on a limited basis back in '92, and then I picked up big time after Commissioner John Bizzack came here in '96. I was pretty much designated the agency liaison for the Department of Criminal Justice Training and the legislative people. Primarily what I do is I coordinate and direct all of our legislative interests – try to get bills passed that we want passed and try to make sure the ones that are devastating to us don't get passed. We've been tremendously successful on our legislative issues in the past 10 years to 12 years.

POPS standards, getting this building – the Bizzack training complex – approved, expanding the basic training program to the current level, the tele academy and the telecommunications professional standards, getting the sheriffs and university police into pay incentive, I mean it just goes on and on and on.

What are your thoughts on being DOCJT's legislative liaison?

That's kind of a mixed bag. It can be very frustrating trying to deal with 130 legislators and coordinate what you can through the administration to make sure that everything falls in line.

When you go to the legislature as an agency liaison you can't go in there as an independent. You go in representing the administration – the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet as well as your agency – and you've got to be very careful that you don't do something to further your interest that might be detrimental to the other departments within the cabinet or to the administration's goal. So you've got to be very careful how you deal with it, but yet it's very rewarding when you can take legislation that you're interested in and see it follow the process – go through and become law and the governor sign it. We've had several of those.

What are some of your jobs in that role?

You have a lot of meetings that you go to. You have a lot of personal contacts with the legislators, people especially that are interested in the same legislation that you are and may sponsor your bills. Those are the kind of people you enjoy meeting with because you're on the same page. On the other hand, you also have to deal with those folks who are opposed to your bills. You've got to talk to those people too and explain to them why this bill needs to be passed and what benefit it's going to be to them. One of the things you absolutely have to do when you're dealing with those folks is be honest. If you've got a bill that's going to adversely affect some of their constituents, you need to just tell them up front – this is a good bill, this is what the bill is going to do, but this group of your constituents is going to be dissatisfied with it. That way they can have a heads up. I can convince them to change their stance and give them some talking points on talking to their constituents who are opposed to the bill, say this is why we need it.

As the agency's liaison to law enforcement associations and the legislature, what are your days like when the legislature is in session?

I stay pretty busy. I usually will be in Frankfort four days a week during the session. I try to get back in the office on Friday to take care of what paperwork I have to. From Monday afternoons through late Thursdays a lot of time it's full time. You try to attend a lot of committee meetings, but I'm very fortunate here because we have a legislative team, and I assign people to go to certain legislative committee meetings. That way I don't have to sit in there all of the time, and they keep me posted on everything that's going on. It's really a team effort. It's not anything that I do personally; it's what everybody else does. It's not necessarily what we do as a legislative team, because quite frankly the legislators don't have a lot of concern about what the Department of Criminal Justice Training wants passed or what they don't want passed. It's their constituents back in their home districts. Part of my job is to make sure that all of the law enforcement officers and agencies, associations throughout the state are aware of what's going on in the legislature that deals with law enforcement and to give them a heads up that if they want their legislator to support this, they probably need to contact them because they listen to hometown people; they don't listen to me.

How did you get to be DOCJT's association and legislative contact? Are you politically savvy?

I am the absolute least politically savvy or connected person in state government. Absolutely. I have no political skills at all. I just deal very well with people one-on-one. I deal very well with people in small groups. I think the biggest thing is, over the years I've built up a lot of trust from these folks, and they know that whatever I tell them is going to be honest. It's not going to be a bunch of crap that they have to worry about second-guessing whether I'm telling them the truth or not. It's just evolved over the years. It actually started when I became training director here in 1992. I traveled all over the state going to police departments and every group that I could get into just to let them know who I was and what I was about and what I thought needed to be done, what didn't need to be done, and to get their input. So I built a great repoire with the chiefs, and I think that just eventually led to me being legislative liaison. Of course, in the early years when John came down here, it was just John and Bernie (Bernard Thompson, former training support director) and me, so we had a lot we had to do. It just evolved that it came out that way.

What are some of the major changes you've witnessed in law enforcement during your career?

When I began at the state police, we didn't even have LINK and NCIC. If you wanted to run a license check, it had to be done manually. You called the dispatcher, they called Frankfort, and if it happened to be at night, you would have to wait until the next morning before you could even find out who the car was registered to. If it was out of state, you didn't get a response until the next day. That's where telecommunications was. Our cruisers didn't have commercial radios, and they didn't have air conditioning. In fact the standard cruiser when I graduated and went to work, you had a radio, and of course you had a firearm. The radios were almost inoperable. You had to pick the locations in the county to go to in order to be able to talk to the dispatcher. You didn't have any form of instant communication. You didn't have backup out in rural Kentucky. You were probably the only law enforcement officer that was available within 40 miles, so whatever you got into, you better be well able to take care of it.

I remember one time I got called out on a car with three guys that had been slashing tires on people's cars. I went over there and found the car – a red, '64 Chevy, a beautiful car. I fell in behind it, turned the blue lights on, and they started running from me; they went north on 57. One of them shot out of the window. I shot back of course. They ended up wrecking. I just kind of pinned the driver's door. I got out with a shotgun. All I could see was six hands sticking up in the air. So I arrested those guys and put them in the Lewis County jail. I called in trying to get a check on this thing. They had Virginia plates. The next day I found out that these guys had escaped from prison in Hanover, Virginia. They had killed a prison guard and stolen his car. I was dealing with these guys not knowing who I was dealing with, by myself, and no other officers were able to help. That's the way it was back in the early days. You just did that stuff. Today, it's not that way. You've got instant communications. You know within 30 seconds that you've got a stolen car with dangerous people in it, and you know that before you start dealing with it. Those are the major changes that have come about. J

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